

A family is never closer (or more challenged) than when a new family member enters the picture. For millions of Americans, this means bringing an adopted child into the warm, caring environment of a new home.

November is National Adoption Month, and it is also a good moment to point out how social service professionals, foster parents, and adoptive families make tremendous sacrifices on behalf of children all over the world. As they work to find permanent homes for orphans and foster children, these individuals and organizations give an incredible gift to children who need a safe, permanent and loving place to live.

For some of these children, they are growing up with adoptive parents they will know and love nearly from birth. For others who are older, the adoption process is a second chance for a stable home. For our nation as a whole, the act of adoption, completed thousands of times each week, demonstrates our respect for life, our belief in the American dream, and the capacity for love within our strong families.

In America, nearly a quarter of a million children entered the foster care system last year. Just as many foster children exited the system, mostly by reunifying with their families (50 percent) or through adoption (25 percent). Still today, hundreds of thousands of American children await adoption into a new home with new hope.

Children from around the world come to America as adoptees, and there is no more powerful statement about the openness and compassion of our nation than that. Between 1999 and 2010, more than 224,000 children from foreign countries were adopted in the United States, and last year 241 adoptions of foreign children were completed in Missouri. Nationwide, whether it was one of 64,000 children from China or one of the two children from Turkmenistan, an American family opened their doors and their arms to a child who will have an unparalleled opportunity in this country.

Children with special needs, too, find loving and accepting homes with parents who take on the responsibility for a young life and its new challenges. Each adoption in America is as unique and special as each live birth.

There is a federal role in supporting adoption: making sure that parents of adopted children have the same rights as those with children who are natural-born and ensuring fairness through the visa process for adoption. Every year, several families seeking assistance with the adoption process (often with international adoptions) seek assistance from my congressional office. I'm never happier to help.

When we think about our families and our communities, it becomes even more obvious that each of us plays a part in making sure adoption is accepted and encouraged as an alternative to abandonment or abortion. To those who make the ultimate act of familial openness on behalf of a child in need of a home, thank you very much. We are a stronger, healthier, happier nation for your loving sacrifice.